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VT - LEAHY
MONTPELIER, VT

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., says he is convinced a South Korean airplane was not on a spy mission last year when it was shot down by the Soviet Union.

Leahy, a senior member of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Sunday disputed the conclusions of an upcoming article in The Nation magazine that reportedly says it was not possible U.S. military intelligence was not aware of the flight.

Leahy said he reviewed the case dozens of times and was convinced intelligence officials were not aware the airliner was off course.

The author of the article, David Pearson of New Haven, Conn., has asked for a congressional investigation.

The civilian plane was shot down Sept. 1, killing 269 passengers and crew members.

"Either we knew and perhaps directed the plane on an intentional spy mission or the case represents the largest single failure in the history of our early warning system," Pearson said Sunday.

Pearson said at least three American radar bases were monitoring the route traveled by the plane.

But Leahy said he had talked to dozens of CIA officials, and was convinced U.S. military intelligence did not know the plane was off course.

"I'm convinced that KAL 007 was not on a spy mission," he said.

The comments were made in an article in the Burlington Free Press.